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ABSTRACT

This booklet of information and accompanying reading selections are intended to help a tutor get started with a new adult learner. The booklet does not provide suggestions for teaching strategies, but rather discusses conducting the initial assessment of learners, observing the student reading, categorizing the students into one of three stages, and assessing students at the three stages of learning. The booklet contains a student interview form. An appendix describes how to determine readability levels of reading passages. Assessment sheets for each of the three stages of learning are attached. (RS)

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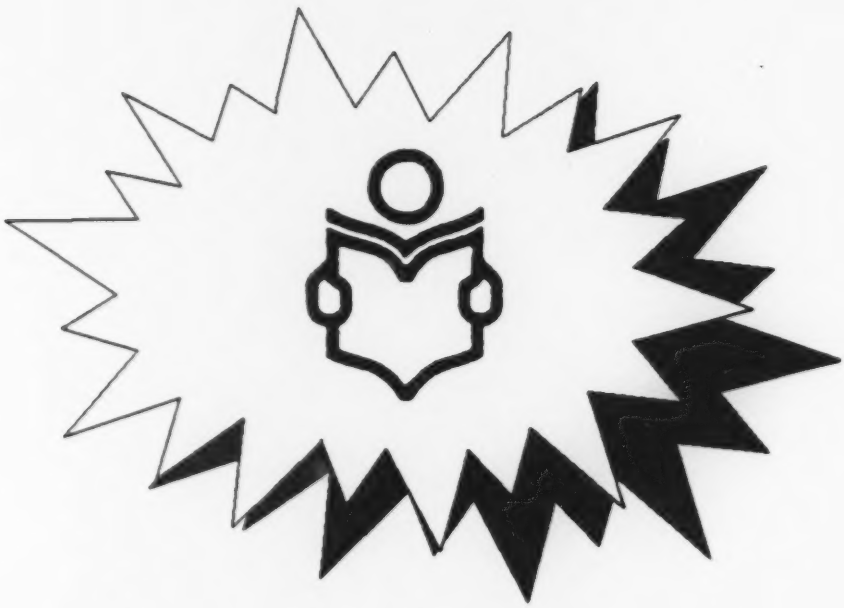
LET'S GET STARTED

An initial assessment pack for adult literacy programs



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PREFACE

This booklet of information and the accompanying reading selections are intended to help a tutor get started with a new learner. This pack does not include teaching approaches or suggestions. Teachers and tutors should refer to Journeyworkers and the Adult Literacy Tutor Pack for teaching approaches and suggestions.

Tutors wishing further advice or information about teaching methods and materials should contact:

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INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF LEARNERS

Interviewing

When students step across the doors of your program, you will obviously need to find out something about them. You will need to get some educational background (e.g. how much schooling the student had), some language background, some information about interest and goals, and some literacy information on what things they can read and write.

The interview process is not meant to be formal or intimidating for the learner. Therefore, you may first want to make the learner feel at ease, by informally discussing the program. You can discuss learning possibilities, other students you have tutored, or the kinds of learners already involved in the program. In some programs, learners can observe the literacy group or tutors at work so that they do not have to decide immediately whether to join the program or not.

Once the learner is committed to joining the literacy program, then some background information needs to be collected.

The Student Interview Form is meant to help in the enroling process. However, individual programs should also feel free to develop their own forms and determine the kind of enrollment information most useful for both you and the learner.

It is recommended that the interview be an oral interview. **Do not ask the learner to fill out the application form.** The interviewer should fill it out, telling the learner what is being written on the form, and explaining that this is information that will help in planning the learning program.

STUDENT INTERVIEW FORM

Date: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Reason for coming to classes:

Educational background:

School experience:

Post-school experience:

Why does student feel s/he did not learn to (read, write, spell, etc.) as well as s/he wanted?

Attendance contract:

Interests/hobbies/vocation

Apparent learning level:

Reading:

Writing:

Spelling:

WHERE SHOULD I START WITH THE LEARNER?

Informal assessment

Unless the student is preparing for a further education experience, it is not recommended that standardized tests be administered upon entering the program. You can get quite a lot of information from students just by talking with them. If the stages of the learning levels are not immediately apparent, we do the following:

- We informally ask the student to read something aloud.
- We ask the student to write a short paragraph, or spell a short dictation.
- In this manner, we can determine general reading and writing needs and/or levels.

Assessment questions

1) What kinds of things can you comfortably read?

   - Can you read street signs?
   - Can you read headlines on the newspapers?
   - Can you read books?
   - Can you read the TV guide?
   - Can you read labels on cans, boxes, etc.

2) What kinds of things would you have difficulty in writing?

   - Application forms
   - Letters
   - Notes to school/messages
   - Reports

3) Do you feel you need help in spelling? Do you think your difficulties in writing stem from not knowing how to spell?

   [If the student is a second language learner]

4) Can you read and/or write in your mother tongue (first language)?

   What things can you read and write in your mother tongue?

OBSERVING THE STUDENT READING

You can offer the learner a range of reading materials from your own collection. It is recommended that learners be allowed to choose what they find comfortable.

A small package of reading passages is included in this kit. However, teachers should not feel obliged to use only this material. After time, it may be useful to include: newspaper articles, literacy reading books, magazine articles, as well as the enclosed passages.

Each reading passage includes information about the probable levels. Students should be encouraged to read aloud and to guess at the words they do not know. In this way their anxiety about making mistakes can be somewhat relieved. In general, most learners can read better than the artificial conditions of an interview session would indicate.

Things to observe when the student reads:

1) How well does the learner make use of the context, pictures, etc. in order to make guesses at unfamiliar words?

2) Does the learner have good phonetic skills? Can the learner sound out unfamiliar words? Can the learner make individual sounds but has difficulty blending them?

3) Does the learner read word for word or is the learner able to read in phrases?

4) Is the learner willing/able to guess at words or does the learner feel so unconfident that guessing is impossible?

5) How well does the learner recall what is read? Was the passage understood? Did the learner read so slowly that comprehension was lost?

CONCLUSIONS TO THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Stage One Learners

If learners say they cannot read at all, have difficulty signing their names, or would have difficulty with simple reading or writing tasks, then these learners are most likely Stage One Learners. (See Assessment Sheets A at the end of this pack for more information.)

Instructional approaches should include: language experience stories, introduction of the alphabet and the notions of print, word recognition activities, photo stories, listening to stories on tape, listening to others read, doing assisted reading with a tutor or teacher.

Stage Two Learners

If the learner can read some headlines, can write simple sentences (even if these have spelling errors in them), can read a basic literacy text, then the learner is probably at Stage 2 in reading and writing development.

Instructional approaches should include: developing writing skills, inventing spelling for the purposes of writing, learning spelling words from their writing, practicing silent reading, doing assisted reading of more difficult texts with other tutors or teachers, etc.

Stage Three Learners

Learners begin this Stage being able to read a text fluently and expressively, understanding what they read, demonstrating some writing fluency, and using a number of strategies for learning to spell. By the end of this Stage, students may be getting ready for college, further training or GED.

For the most part, these learners will need instructional approaches that include: developing a variety of writing skills (e.g. essay writing, proofreading, re-drafting and re-writing, styles of writing), individualized spelling for their own particular needs, reading comprehension, vocabulary development and advanced reading assignments.

ASSESSING THE STAGE ONE LEARNER

This pack includes five sheets (indicated with an A in the upper right-hand corner) to use with learners who appear to be at Stage One.

Introducing the Reading Sheets

The tutor/teacher should say the following to the learner:

> "I am going to ask you to look at some pictures and words. This is to see what kinds of things about reading and writing you already know, so that we can figure out more about your learning. As you look at the pictures and words I would like you to guess at what you think the words say. I will probably also ask you some questions as we go along."

Observing the learner reading

You might use the cards in the following ways::

To determine how well the learner can predict words in context.

Show the learner each card and ask him/her to guess at what the words on the pages say. Encourage learners to use the pictures in order to make logical guesses. If the learner makes a guess which does not seem to make sense to the tutor, then the tutor should ask the learner, "What made you guess that?" The learner may have a good reason for guessing a particular word.

To determine how well the learner can discriminate similar letters and words.

On some cards, words are repeated. Ask the learner to match words on each page. Or you can say, "How many times does the word 'bingo' appear on this page?"

To determine what letters of the alphabet the learner recognizes and can identify.

Select one of the cards. Ask the learner to name the letters s/he sees on the page. Make a note of this information on a separate page.

Writing and Spelling

Learners at this Stage will have very little fluency in writing. They may be able to do simple writing tasks such as their names or addresses. They may be able to copy writing and often know the alphabet from memory.

ASSESSING THE STAGE TWO LEARNER

If you suspect your learner is at Stage Two, then you should use the cards indicated with a B in the upper-right hand corner.

Introducing the Reading Cards

The tutor/teacher should say to the learner:

> "In order to find out what kinds of reading materials would suit you, I am going to ask you to read out loud from one of these cards. Choose whichever one you wish."

Show the four cards to the learner. Read the title at the top of each for the learner. Ask the learner to choose one. Then say,

> "I would like you to read this out loud. Take as much time as you need. If you don't recognize any of the words, guess at them as best you can."

Observing the learner reading

Do not interrupt while learners are reading. However, if they are stuck, help them out. If learners read these passages with ease, you may want to ask them to read something from the Stage Three.

If the learner makes less than five errors, then the passage is well within the reading level. If the learner makes more than 5 to 7 errors, this material will be within their instructional level. However, they will not be able to read material this complex on their own.

After the learner has read the passage, ask the learner to retell it to you in his/her own words. You can then see how well the learner is reading for comprehension.

Writing and Spelling

You can ask the learner to write a few simple sentences or a short paragraph. Encourage the learner to guess at how words might be spelled but don't be surprised if the learner takes few risks in this situation.

This writing sample should give you an idea about the following:

- How fluent a handwriter is the learner?
- What vocabulary can the learner easily spell?
- What concepts about writing does the learner have?

ASSESSING THE STAGE THREE LEARNER

If you suspect your learner is a Stage Three learner, you should use the cards indicated with a C in the upper right hand corner.

Introducing the Reading Cards

The tutor should say to the learner:

> "In order to get an idea of how you read, I would like you to select one of these passages to read out loud. Take your time and look them over if you wish. When you are ready, read the selection out loud. If you need to guess at words, go right ahead."

Let the learner choose one of the C cards.

Observing the learner reading

Do not interrupt or correct learners while they are reading. Give encouragement if you feel the learner is asking for it. When the learner is finished reading, ask her to tell you what it was about.

Fluent readers should be able to recall most details. Even if a number of words have been misread, the learner should be able to summarize the passage.

Writing and Spelling

The learner should easily be able to write a paragraph or two about some personal experience, job experience, hobby, interest in education, etc. The learner at this stage should have general ideas about paragraph construction and sentence construction. The learner should be able to use a variety of sentence forms even if punctuation or grammar is not yet accurate.

You should discuss spelling with the learner and encourage her to guess at how words are spelled.

You may wish to dictate a short passage to see what kind of mistakes the learner is making. (See CARDS D for spelling passages.)

APPENDIX A: Determining Readability Levels

Introduction

Teachers can easily find out the reading levels of any text. The following procedure will give a grade level equivalent for any text with 100 words or more.

Fogg's Test of Readability

Procedure

1) Take any sample of 100 words in complete sentences.

2) Count only whole sentences by counting periods. If the last full sentence stops short of the 100th word, count only the full sentences for this stage.

3) Divide the number of sentences into 100: answer = x.

4) Count the number of words with three or more syllables. Omit capitalized words such as names: answer = y.

5. Add the number of words with more than three syllables to your answer, [i.e. x = 5; y = 4; answer: 9].

6) Multiply your answer (x + y) by 0.3 to give a grade equivalent.

7) Example:

   a) Four complete sentences [100÷4 = 25]

   b) Nine words with three or more syllables:

   c) 25 + 9 = 34

   d) 34 x .3 = 10.2

NOTE: **This readability test gives reading levels that are slightly high, so the material may actually be somewhat easier to read than this test indicates.**

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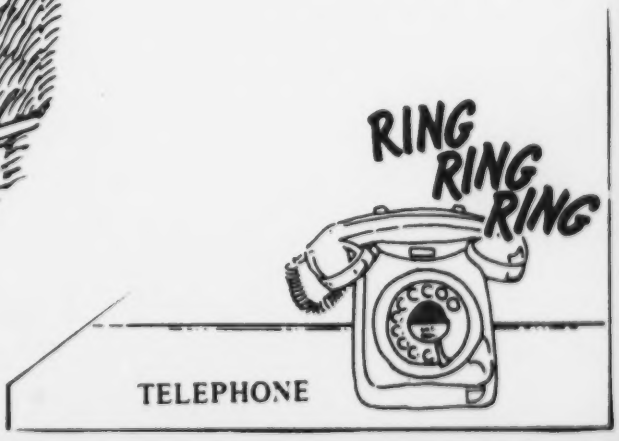
A

TELEPHONE

Telephone Book

Telephone



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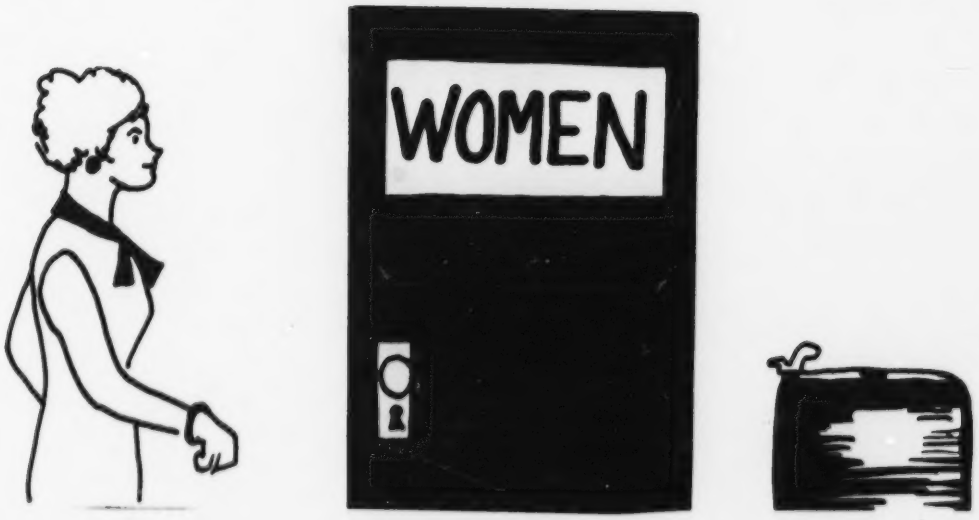

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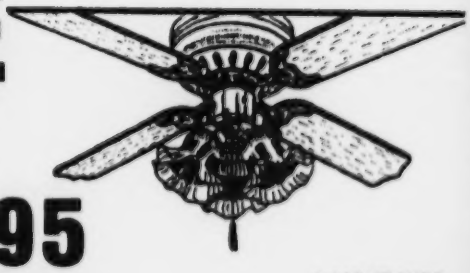

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HARVESTING WILD RICE

August is the time to harvest the wild rice. The Indian people have always harvested wild rice. In the past, they used the 2 stick method to knock the rice into the canoe. Now they use a custom-made harvester to pick more rice.

Wild rice grows in shallow lakes. If the water level is too high, the rice won't grow. If the water level is too low, the rice won't grow. The water level must be just right.

It was raining hard. Water covered the road. The truck moved slowly. Its heavy tires cut a path in the water.

Madge was driving. She never took her eyes off the road.

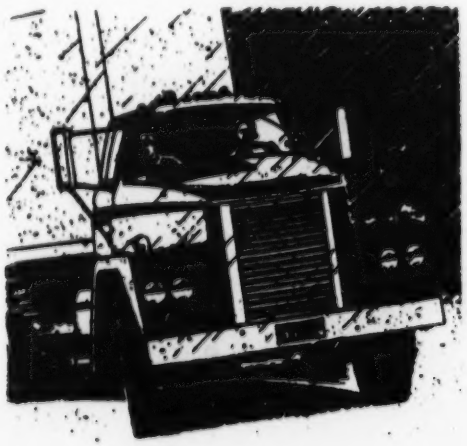
Len watched the road, too. Two pairs of eyes were better than one. it would be easy to go off the road. Finally Len spoke. "Want me to drive?" he asked.

"No," said Madge. "It's my turn. And besides, you are tired."

"Want the radio?" Len asked.

"Not if you don't," Madge answered.

Madge liked country music. She liked Charley Pride best. But the stations around here didn't play country music.



KEEPING MY LANGUAGE ALIVE

I was three years old when I first went to boarding school. I went there speaking and understanding only Cree. While I was in boarding school all the "caregivers" spoke English. But all the students spoke a variety of Native Languages. It was always confused because I never knew what language to speak to anyone. My sisters and brother kept the language alive for me in those early years of my life in boarding school. Punishment was harsh for speaking a Native Language. Often we were ridiculed and were deprived of food, put in solitary confinement and were constantly harassed by the supervisors.

When I was about six my parents kept me at home because I was losing the Cree language. I went to the reserve school and during the winter and spring trapping seasons I went to the trapline with my grandparents. Life was wonderful again because I was loved and respected for who I was. I quickly learned Cree again but I was still able to speak English.

I became the translator for my mom and the older people whenever they had to do business in town: shopping, visiting the doctor or the Indian agent. I felt useful and worthwhile doing this.

A DEAD BATTERY

Last night the temperature was -34 degrees. When Tim tried to start his car this morning, there was nothing but a sick sounding "rr...rrr...r...rr". Tim forgot to plug in the block heater and now the battery was dead.

Tim has to drive his car to work because there are no buses. Tim need a boost for the battery. Luckily his neighbour, Mary, was just leaving her house for work.

1. "Oh good, here comes my neighbour. I'll ask her to give me a boost."

2. "Hey Mary!"

3. "Morning Mary. Can you give me a hand?"

4. "Sure Tim, what's the problem?

5. "I forgot to plug in my car. I ran the battery down trying to start it. Can you give me a boost?"

6. "No problem Tim. But I don't have any jumper cables."
"That's okay, I do. I just bought them yesterday."

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From: Angel Square by Brian Doyle C

I didn't really blame Miss Strong for laughing when I said I wanted to be a writer.

After all, I was the second worst writer in the class.

Melody Bleach was the worst writer in the class. Her main problem was she never had a pencil and she couldn't write with a pen and nib because she pressed too hard.

Dad said the reason was, she wasn't organized.

And she always put her tongue out when she tried to write after she borrowed a pencil or the teacher gave her one. She'd stick her tongue between her teeth when she was trying to think of what to write. Some of the kids would laugh at her and make fun of her.

I laughed at her too but I also felt sort of sorry for her.

Specially when she wet herself. That was in grade three, I think. Melody wet herself. She was too scared of Miss Brack of Miss Eck, or whoever it was, to ask if she could leave the room.

So she just sat there and the water ran down off the seat into a pool on the floor under her desk. And the water ran down her cheeks from her eyes. There was water running out of her from both ends.

I think Dad was right. Her main problem was that she wasn't organized. Dad always says, get organized and you can't go wrong.

From: Voices. by Jill Kristofferson. Fall 1988. C

FIRST JOB

At the age of sixteen and after I had just passed grade ten I decided to get a job for the summer. All dressed up in my best wool suit and good shoes, I was set to take the world on. I asked my mom if she would drive me to Whalley but she shook her head no. We had very lousy bus services, so it was walking or nothing. I walked all the way to Whalley, about six miles to put in a couple of applications. It was a hot day for June and walking was very difficult. I was getting very tired and frustrated from the heat, walking to much, and from the turn-downs from the employers. The last place I went to was Panco Poultry.

I stood outside the office door for a few minutes to get my nerves together, as I had butterflies in my stomach. I walked to the closest desk and said that I was looking for a job for the summer. A short, half bald man of 50 looked at me with cold blue eyes. He asked me one question which threw me off guard. The question was, "Are you right handed?" I said, "Yes."

He then said, "You start Monday morning at 7:30 a.m."

I couldn't believe my ears,. I got a job! My heart skipped a beat as I skipped out the door.

"Leaving Home Creates Discontent in Families" Universal Press Syndicate by Erma Bombeck.

The family that played together, prayed together, and were raised together now get on each other's nerves. What's the matter with everybody?

A letter from Melissa, a graduating high school senior in Denver, offers an explanation. "My mother returned to working after being a housewife for 17 years. I was unprepared for this shock and didn't take it very well. For 17 years I had someone there to give me aspirin if I was sick, make sure I ate right, and do my laundry. Then, she was gone.

"Lately, we have been having a lot of arguments. I now realize... why we have been arguing. When I was little all I wanted to do was grow up and my mother thought I was growing too fast. Now all I want is to be seven years old and have my bicycle back, and my mother is ready for me to grow up."

Melissa said it pretty well.

What we're talking about here is panic. Panic of parents who have just been fired from a job they thought would go on forever and panic from children who thought parents loved them so much they would never abandon them.

Everyone is running around trying to act cool so no one can see how scared they are.

The parents are questioning if they spent enough time with their children, taught them the right things, loved them enough. The kids are wondering if

they can make it outside of the cocoon and where they will fit in, and what happens to them if they don't?

Wouldn't it be wonderful if parents could look at their teenagers and say, "I want you to stay, but you can't."

Wouldn't it be wonderful if teenagers could look at their parents and say, "I don't want to leave, but I must."

It's so much better to close the door gently on childhood... than to slam it.

SPELLING DICTATION

Instructions

The tutor should prepare the learner for the dictation in the following manner:

> "I am going to dictate a short paragraph so that I can get an idea of the kind of spelling attempts you might make with unfamiliar words. You can take as much time as you need and you should guess as best you can at words you don't know how to spell."

Dictation

A peculiar shape was approaching from the southern valley. The machine touched down with precision in the rough mountainous region without even scraping its surface. The children surrounded the pilot who explained that his altimeter and temperature gauge were damaged and he was anxious about increasing altitude in these freezing conditions. From the alpine school he telephoned his base requesting spare instruments to be delivered and fitted immediately.

The children viewed the repairs with enthusiasm, especially when they were taken in groups for an unforgettable flight before the pilot's final departure.